

HOW I GOT FAT

LOOKING FOR STARVATION
IN SOVIET RUSSIA



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(A. F. of L.)



NEW ENGLAND DISTRICT OF THE
FRIENDS OF THE SOVIET UNION
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FOREWORD

I WAS one of twelve workers and farmers elected by their own trade unions and fraternal organizations under the auspices of the Friends of the Soviet Union to visit the U.S.S.R. and report back how Socialism works in practice. William Randolph Hearst, in his chain of newspapers such as the *Boston American*, the *Boston Advertiser*, the *New York Evening Journal*, and others, had been spreading statements that there were no real trade unions in the Soviet Union, that Soviet citizens were starving, that the Soviet Union is run by a dictator. We were sent over by these workers and farmers to find out whether Hearst was telling the truth or was lying. We were sent over to find out how Soviet citizens work and play, what sort of food they eat, how they run their trade unions and collective farms, whether they have any unemployment, what provisions are made for old age and disability, how women and children are treated, and much more.

Among us were representatives of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers (A. F. of L.), of the United Mine Workers of America (A. F. of L.), of the United Textile Workers of America (A. F. of L.), of the Wisconsin Cooperative Milk Pool, of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (A. F. of L.), of Dyers Local No. 1773, Paterson, N. J., and of many other organizations. Four of us are Socialist Party members. There was a Michigan dirt farmer, a Wisconsin dairy farmer, a school teacher, and a doctor. Various nationalities were represented—Lithuanian, Italian, Polish, Jewish, Negro, French-Canadian. We had both Catholics and Protestants among us.

I was elected at a mass meeting of New Bedford, Massachusetts, by textile workers and others, and endorsed by the Weavers' Union, U.T.W.A. (A. F. of L.). Various church organizations and religious clubs helped make up the sum necessary for the trip. I am a slasher-tender's helper, working on the last process on cotton yarn: assembling and sizing the ends before they go to the weave room. I earn \$16.70 a week. I am a practising Roman Catholic, a member in good standing of the Socialist Party, and a former member of the National Guard. I attended parochial school, then left school after the sixth grade to go to work. My father is a textile worker, a union member of forty-five years' standing. I am of French-Canadian descent, and both English and French were spoken at home.

So much for who we are! The most important part follows—what we saw in the Soviet Union.

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By WILLIAM H. DUPREY

French Sailors and Russian Sailors

WE traveled third-class to London on the French liner *Ile de France*, and from London to Leningrad on the Russian boat *Cooperatzia*.

The crew of the *Ile de France* told us they were all members of the French Socialist Party. On learning that four of us were Socialists, many members of the crew urged us to join in a united front with the Communist workers, the way they had done in France. The French sailors had to work very hard, and had almost no time for themselves. Discipline was very strict, and we passengers were discouraged by the officers from talking with the sailors.

The atmosphere on the Soviet boat was strangely different. The sailors didn't salute their officers, but called them "Comrade." Off duty, I was surprised to see the captain and members of the crew walking arm-in-arm and singing for all they were worth. There was a big common room for sailors and officers together, and a "red corner" with a bust of Lenin and books and papers. The crew was not worked too hard, they told me. They would be on land during the next trip of the *Cooperatzia*, with full pay—they took one trip out of two, so that they could be home with their wives and families half the time. I noticed that discipline was strict while the sailors were on watch, and both officers and sailors seemed competent in their work.

Leningrad

We were met at the dock in Leningrad by representatives of trade unions, and newspaper reporters and photographers. There was a workers' band from a shop—a good one. After speeches in Russian and English we went to our hotel and had dinner. It was a very good dinner, but the service was poor. There weren't enough waiters, I was told. The reason for this is that they take other jobs.

The next day we visited the Fortress of Peter and Paul, a former dungeon for political prisoners—workers imprisoned by the Russian capitalists because they struggled for workers' rights and a workers' government. It is a museum now. The former Czar's palace is also a museum—everything remaining just as the Czar's family left it. Everywhere I went in the Soviet Union I saw historical places—former prisons, palaces, many of the churches—kept intact, as museums.

I knew I had been sent by the New Bedford workers for something more important than looking at museums. So the next few days I spent in investigating textile mills in Leningrad. During my stay in the Soviet Union I concentrated on textile mills and clothing shops, seeing with my own eyes how they are run, what kind of machinery they use, how the trade unions are organized and who runs them, the hours, wages, and living conditions of textile and clothing workers.

Amateur Detective Work in the Soviet Union

Before I left America some of my friends warned me not to believe everything I should be told. "You'll be shown only what they want you to see," I was warned. "So keep your eyes open."

So, during my stay in the Soviet Union I did a little amateur detective work. Trade union delegations would come and inform us that such and such a textile mill would be a good mill to visit. I would thank them very kindly, then with my fellow-delegate, Adam Chada, a Lithuanian miner from Pennsylvania who spoke Russian, would go out and investigate a textile mill the trade union hadn't recommended. Later we would look over the model mill too. Often Chada and I would be riding on a street car. I'd pull him by the sleeve, "Let's get off here." We'd get off and walk right into a worker's home. Chada would explain who we were, and the worker would show us his home. We were never able to get away until we had eaten a meal with the worker, and had drunk some good Soviet wine. In this way we averaged about six meals a day. *In my attempt to find a starving family in Russia, which Mr. Hearst speaks about I gained fifteen pounds.*

Textile Mills in the Soviet Union

I visited the "Red Rose" mill in Leningrad, which is the largest textile mill in Europe. They turn out finished cotton goods and a little woolen. In 1930 the average wage in the mill was 93 rubles a month. In 1935 it is 184, and many workers earn much more. Most of the work is piece-work. They do not have pick-clocks, but use their own system of measuring work—supervised, needless to say, by the workers themselves. Women get the same wages as men for the same work.

All dangerous machinery is safeguarded. Some machinery we would not think of safeguarding in the United States (for instance, the lower belt-pulleys in the slasher room) is covered. In the weave room, where the shuttle strikes inside the casing, it is covered.

It costs a worker with a family about 168 rubles a month for food. Workers pay 10% of their wages a month for rent. Union dues are 1% of wages monthly.

Thus if both a worker and his wife are working, they have money for many luxuries as well as necessities. No wonder 70% of workers in the Soviet Union have bank accounts.

A silk weaver takes care of three looms on the average—never six looms, as in the United States. The highest number of looms a loom-fixer takes care of is 40 in cotton mills—never 100 as here. In the slasher room, each helper makes size for his own slasher tender, and takes care of only one machine. In the United States a helper takes care of three machines.

I found out that efficiency methods are used in the U.S. S.R. as much as in the United States, although for a different purpose. In the United States the efficiency expert is called in to procure more profits for the shareholders, while in the U.S.S.R. efficiency is used to get out more production to supply the consumers' demand, as there is a shortage of textiles. The product of this increased production is returned to the workers in the form of higher wages, newer machinery, more vacations, etc.

I can truthfully say the stretchout system is not used. For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the textile industry I should say that the stretchout is a capitalist scheme whereby a job is increased so as to get out the same amount of work by employing fewer people and paying less wages. For example, in the weave room, where the stretchout is most used, three men may be taking care of sixty looms, or twenty looms each. The bosses find that they are not making enough profit, so they fire one man, and have the other two run sixty looms between them. This

means a 33½ per cent increase in work. In many cases the men are given a wage-cut, and told that they will be able to make much better wages with the extra looms they are running. It works out that each worker receives never more than 10 per cent more wages than he did with his original 20 looms, but puts out one-third more production. The two workers together get 20 per cent more wages—if they are lucky—while the boss pockets the rest.

Conditions

Lighting in Soviet mills is very good. Windows are about six feet apart, and are six feet wide by eight feet high. Ventilation is so good that the mechanical ventilation systems in use are hardly necessary. The condition of lavatories in Soviet mills, however, is very poor. I remarked on this, and was told the government is appropriating millions of rubles annually to remedy this.

Compulsory health inspections are given workers twice a year, and anyone not in proper health is taken off his job and sent to a rest home, a sanatorium, or hospital. While there he receives full pay and free medical attention and lodging.

As soon as a woman knows she is pregnant she tells the supervisor, and if she is on a night shift she is immediately taken off it. She is given a two months' vacation before the birth of the child, and returns to work two months after its birth. In the meantime the mother receives full pay, and doctors' services and hospital care are free. The hospital gives the baby a complete outfit, consisting of clothes, bed, and blankets. Also special food is given the mother for a certain period of time before and after the birth of the child. Each mill or factory has a nursery. If a mother is nursing her child she is allowed a nursing

period every three hours to go to the nursery and feed the child.

The workers eat dinner in a dining room attached to the mill and run by the mill workers. Dining rooms are large and airy and the price of a meal is very low. The food is good.

All workers who are not educated attend the school which the mill has for its workers.

Hours

Textile workers work seven hours a day during a five-day week. The sixth day is a rest-day. They cannot smoke at the machines, but there is a smoking room and library. They have a five-minute rest period every hour.

Workers up to 18 years of age have a six-hour day. Out of this they work in the mill four hours and study two hours. They are paid for the full six hours, however. Under the age of 18 nobody is allowed to work on the night shift.

When I told this to a friend of mine in America she said, "Well, we have pictures of such ideal conditions in our minds. But they don't correspond with reality in the U. S. A. I have to work in a cotton mill from 6 A. M. to 1:30 P. M. During these 7½ hours I am not allowed time for dinner—I have to eat while I work."

These good wages, conditions, and hours are possible as a result of the marvelous social insurance plan which the Soviet Union has, and which we American workers are fighting hard to get with our Workers' Social Insurance Bill—H.R. 2827.

Clothing Shops

I also investigated the needle trades in the Soviet Union. A garment shop in Simferopol gives a good idea of the

needle trades in the Soviet Union. This shop employs 2,200 workers—Tartars, Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, and 18 other nationalities. There is no racial or national discrimination against any of these.

The cutting department of this shop works two shifts of 7 hours each. The older workers work 7 hours, the young workers under 18 work 6 hours. Designers get 600 rubles per month. Wages of cutters vary from 200 to 300 rubles per month.

Wages are not quite so high in the garment trade as in the textile industry. Just as in all other factories, however, there is free medical care, the same vacations and sick-leaves with pay, the same special consideration for mothers and young workers. Shops and mills run their own stores. One thing I noticed was the display of large quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables in these stores.

Work tables for girl workers are constructed in the form of a large horse-shoe. Inside this horse-shoe sits the worker, elbows resting on the table. The conveyor system is used, all work being brought to the worker and taken away again.

Of all of the 2,200 workers in this shop, only *one girl* was using artificial light. There was plenty of daylight for the rest.

No boss hangs around the girls telling them to step on it or they'll lose their jobs. The girls don't have to go out with the boss to keep their jobs, either.

Here, as everywhere else in the Soviet Union, there was no unemployment. Anytime he wishes, a worker can change his job. He simply tells the supervisor where he wants to go, and gives him seven days' notice. He is then transferred to his new job with no loss of pay. I couldn't help making a mental comparison with the inability of most

American workers to keep the job they are working at, let alone shift from one job to another without loss of pay.

Trade Unions in the U.S.S.R.

The workers run their union, just as they run their government. All during my stay in the Soviet Union I didn't see any strikes, or picket lines, with cops clubbing workers. When I remarked on this to a worker, he told me, "When we want conditions improved, we can get them bettered through our trade union. The government is our own government, run by ourselves through our trade unions, so there is no need to strike against ourselves."

Trade unions in the U. S. S. R. are industrial and not by craft. Every factory is on full time, most on three 7-hour shifts. Trade union members showing special talent along some particular line—acting, writing, medicine, science, research, etc.—are taken from the factory by the trade union and sent to school or the University, and are paid while studying. I met an actor who played in the movie *Chapayev*—formerly a textile worker like myself.

The average pay in the Soviet Union in 1932 was 108 rubles per month. In 1933 it was 198, in 1934 217 rubles per month. As wages go up, the cost of living goes down. Before the revolution, wages averaged 27 to 38 rubles per month. And today the buying power of the ruble is three times greater!

How is it possible for living costs to go down while wages go up? As the workers in the factories, mines, and shops get out more production, more and better goods, more social wealth is produced. As a result of increased production, more and better machinery can be installed, and wages are boosted. And because there are no profits and there

are no private mill owners or share holders, prices go down. The production of the mills is set for a given year by the Commissariat for Light Industries, and is based on the needs of the people of the country, the material at hand, and the ability of the workers to produce. Fifty per cent of the increased wealth of the mills goes annually to the Living Conditions Fund, which is used to make further improvements in housing and living conditions.

An interesting example of the way the workers are safeguarded by their trade unions occurred in a mill I visited, where the visiting physician discovered a woman worker who complained of pains in her back. At 10 A.M. he recommended that her bench be lifted one foot. By 11:30 the bench had been raised according to the doctor's recommendation.

Religion in the Soviet Union

In Leningrad I met a former schoolmate of mine, Rev. Father Leopold Brun, who had gone to the "Sacred Heart" parochial school in New Bedford with me. He is a Roman Catholic priest, of French-Canadian descent like myself, living in the Soviet Union and practising his faith there. Naturally, being a practising Catholic myself, and meeting a boyhood friend who was a Catholic priest in the Soviet Union. I was intensely interested.

He told me there was no attempt by the Soviet government to interfere with him or his parishioners or prevent them from freely practising their religion. There is, of course, much anti-religious feeling among the workers, he told me. This is natural, for, as he explained to me, under the Czar religion was used by the capitalist government to oppress the workers. Since the workers now have their own

government, and there is no longer any capitalist government, the church has been separated from the state. Religion is now what it ought to be—a personal matter. When I asked him why many churches were closing and being used for other purposes, he explained to me that most people following the teachings of the church in the Soviet Union today were older persons, and that they are too few to contribute to the upkeep of so many churches and to pay taxes on church property.

May Day in Moscow

I'm not an orator or poet, and I can't describe May Day in Moscow. The spectacle of free and happy workers, marching by millions, carefree and singing, one hundred per cent behind their government, while the Red Army marched and planes roared overhead to show the world the readiness of the Soviet workers to defend their government; the spirit of the youngsters; the people of 75 years or so, who had known oppression under the Czar, marching arm-in-arm with kids who had grown up under socialism—all this was a tremendous experience for me, one which I can never forget.

May Day in Moscow certainly makes a liar out of Mr. Hearst, and his paid scribblers, the so-called "Socialist" Lang, Smith, Admiral Stirling, Ripley, and the rest of the menagerie. Travelling 6,000 miles in the Soviet Union, including the Ukraine, we saw not a single instance of starvation or destitution, but on the contrary a healthy, happy people courageously working to build socialism. We sent a telegram to the Friends of the Soviet Union and to Socialist Party headquarters confirming this.

Education

The Soviet Union is the only country in the world where students are paid while studying. Everywhere we went new schools were going up. In every factory and mill, on street cars, on the street, people were reading. The day a new novel depicting the growth of Socialism comes out in the Soviet Union, there is a mad rush on the bookstores, and often before night the entire first edition is exhausted.

In Gorlooka I visited an orphans' home, where children of from about 4 to 12 years of age whose parents are dead live and study. I picked out a lad of about 11 and questioned him through an interpreter. His ready answers and grasp of information amazed me.

"Which form of government would you rather have—that in Germany or that in the Soviet Union?" I asked him.

"Do you realize how big a sacrifice we'd be making if we went back to capitalism?" he answered. "Over here everybody is working, we have plenty to eat, clothes, and most of all—freedom. What have they got in Germany? Oppression by the ruling class. No freedom of speech. A madman by the name of Hitler who slaughters or throws into prison everybody who disagrees with him and doesn't approve of his form of government."

I asked him a puzzler, thinking he would surely not know a thing about it. "What do you think of Huey Long?"

"We have Huey Longs in Russia," the boy told me. "Only over here we call them by their right name—balloons. Big bags full of hot air."

When I finished questioning him he began to question me. He asked me many things about our trade unions, working conditions in America, and so on. "What do you think of the N.R.A.?" he asked me suddenly.

I winked at the interpreter. "It's a fine thing," I told the boy. "If labor gets behind it we'll get everything we want."

The boy looked puzzled. "Either this fellow is crazy, or very ignorant, or he's just making fun of me," he told the interpreter. "Everybody knows that the N.R.A. is good for just one thing—to increase the profits of the boss at the expense of the workers."

I want to emphasize the fact that Russian children, however, are not sissies and are not spoiled, pert youngsters. They are bright, healthy, well-informed children, interested in sports and play. And they have the assurance and self-possession that only real freedom can give them.

Back to the Land of Unemployment

Returning from Leningrad via the Kiel Canal, we would frequently see German workers. We would wave, and in reply they would stretch their arms out at an angle in the Nazi salute. Then they would look carefully about them, slowly bring their arm back, and their fists would clench in the red salute to the hammer and sickle flying at our prow.

In London two things struck me—the filthiness of the subway compared with the subway in Moscow, and the fact that crowds of people stood gazing into show windows, but hardly anybody went in. In the Soviet Union the stores are crowded, and crowds dash out of one store and into another, as if they are afraid the goods will be gone before they can buy.

I was not in New York five minutes before I saw a picket line, with cops threatening the pickets.

Much else I cannot relate for lack of space. I should like to have told how the 168 different nationalities in the

U.S.S.R. are treated, and the absolute lack of race-prejudice; to have written at length of the Red Army and its role in promoting world peace; of the freedom of the press, and the vast amount of newspapers and books sold and given to the workers; of the wonderful new Moscow subway, where I dropped a cigarette butt, for which I was reproved by a worker who objected to my littering *his* subway by so much as a cigarette-butt; of the new homes, schools, factories, and hospitals going up everywhere; of the wonderful solidarity of the workers; of the fun I had with them on their rest-days, going on picnics, singing songs with them, eating their good food, drinking their good wine; of the collective farms, in one of which our farmer delegate drawled, after inspecting the pig-pen, "Hell, they treat their pigs over here better than we farmers are treated in Michigan"; of the workers' theatres, museums, parks of culture and rest, and much more.

All I can say is this: HEARST LIES. Socialism works; I have seen it work in the Soviet Union.

Don't learn about the Soviet Union from enemies of labor—the Hearsts, the Langs, the capitalist press. Learn about the Soviet Union from the publications of the Friends of the Soviet Union, from those brothers of your trade unions and members of your churches and fraternal organizations who have gone there and have seen Socialism in practice, and have found out that it can work.

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